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ABSTRACT

The spontaneous use of two deictic forms in the speech of Samoan children was examined. Recordings were made of four Samoan children interacting with their families at monthly intervals over a ten-month period. The children were approximately 2 years old at the start of the study. The speech elements examined were the particles signifying "toward" and "away from." The purpose of the analysis was to show that directional terms indicating movement toward are more congruent with children's early understanding of spatial relations than are terms indicating movement away from. The data demonstrated how deictic particles in Samoan are used to refer to a variety of semantic relations that may or may not involve a metaphorical extension of the notions of movement toward and movement away from. The semantic relations seemed to be more explicitly grammaticized in Samoan than in other languages. Children's reference to these semantic relations was constrained by their preference for expressing movement toward and their preference for encoding action relations rather than state relations. (RW)

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DEICTIC PARTICLES IN SAMOAN CHILD LANGUAGE*

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This paper documents the spontaneous use of two deictic forms in the speech of young Samoan children. These deictic elements are the particles -mai'toward' and -atu'away from'. This report is part of a larger study of developmental patterns in the use of deictic verbs of motion in Samoan (Platt 1982).

The present analysis of Samoan children's use of deictic particles has two primary goals. First, it provides cross-linguistic support for certain claims made in the child language literature on lexical acquisition. Specifically, this study supports the claim that directional terms indicating movement toward are more congruent with children's early understanding of spatial relations than are terms indicating movement away from (e.g. Clark and Garnica 1974, Macrae 1976a). Further, it is in line with previous accounts demonstrating children's early preference for encoding action relations rather than state relations (e.g. Bloom, Lightbown and Hood 1975, Greenfield and Smith 1976, Nelson 1973). The second goal of this report is to show how a syntactic unit common to Polynesian languages, Samoan in particular, explicitly grammaticizes certain semantic relationships that might not be as overtly realized in other languages. The syntactic unit under consideration here is a lexical item denoting an action or state followed by the particle -mai'toward' or -atu'away from'. As discussed below, this structure encapsulates a metaphorical extension of the semantic relations TOWARD and AWAY FROM in a way that English does not (c.f. Clark 1974). The intent of this paper is to demonstrate how Samoan children's acquisition of this syntactic unit and its semantic functions can shed light on the relationship between children's early use of directional terms and their use of lexical items denoting action relations versus state relations.

Data for this study are drawn from transcribed audio- and video-recordings of four Samoan children and their families in a traditional Western Samoan village. Samples of spontaneous speech were collected in naturalistic settings such as during meals or play activities. The recordings were made every four to five weeks for approximately three hours over a nine- to ten-month period. The four children in this study (including their sex and age at the onset of recording) are: Iakopo (M, 2;1), Matu'u (F, 2;1), Naomi (F, 2;10) and Niulala (M, 2;11). The analysis presented below is based on a corpus of 248 spontaneous child utterances containing -mai or -atu.

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Deictic particles such as -mai'toward' and -atu'away from' are a major grammatical feature of a large subgroup of the world's languages. They are characteristic of a wide variety of Polynesian languages. Deictic particles in Polynesian languages are generally used to indicate spatial orientation or direction of movement, i.e. movement toward or away from, with respect to a particular reference point. This reference point, or deictic center (Fillmore 1971), may be the speaker, the addressee, a third person or an object. The particles

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of interest in this report could therefore be more fully glossed as -mai'toward deictic center' and -atu'away from deictic center'.

Before turning to the child language data, it is necessary to present more specific information on the function of -mai and -atu in adult Samoan. -Mai and -atu in Samoan have been defined as 'particles [which] denote literal or figurative movement' with respect to a particular reference point, or deictic center (Milner 1978). When -mai and -atu specify literal movement, they are referring to actions involving a change in location of the actor, agent or object. When -mai and -atu specify figurative movement, they refer to actions not involving a change in location or to states of being. In performing these functions, -mai and -atu do not occur independently, but rather in conjunction with other lexical elements.

At this point, it is important to mention that the examples of the use of -mai and -atu in this paper are instances of one of the two phonetically distinct speech registers used by Samoan speakers. One register is used in contexts closely associated with western cultural tradition, including reading and writing (Shore 1982). In this register, the particles -mai and -atu are realized as [mai] and [atu]. The other speech register is generally used in all other contexts, for example, in casual speech between Samoans. In this register, /t/ is realized as [k]. Thus, -mai and -atu are realized as [mai] and [aku]. The examples used in this account are all instances of casual speech between Samoans, that is, the latter speech register. This means that the particle -atu will appear as [aku] in the examples. However, when the function of the particles is discussed independently of a particular example, the citation forms -mai and -atu are used.

Examples (1) to (6) below illustrate the four major semantic functions of -mai and -atu as they occurred in the child speech corpus.[1] Examples (1) and (2) show the use of the particles to indicate literal movement, that is, to refer to actions involving a change in location of the actor, agent or object. Utterances of this type make reference to a source of movement, a goal of movement, and the path between them. The actions referred to involve some entity moving along the path from the source to the goal. Thus, -mai can specify movement along a path toward the goal, and -atu can specify movement along a path away from the source.

Example (1) shows the use of a particle to specify literal movement, an action involving a change in location. The syntactic unit is an intransitive verb plus a particle.

(1) NAOMI (3;8) VIII-3(1)-258: Naomi is trying to blow air into a plastic bag and then pop it. Her brother, Aimalala (Ai), has his head in Naomi's lap.

N: ese e-so [=soso] aku (ma le) mea lea*/ [*the bag]
away move away from conj art thing this
(Move away from this thing.) [to Ai]

kae so aku fa [=fai] se ka pulugu* [=palugi]/
shit move away from do art my balloon [*the bag]
(Shit, move away from [me] so I can pop my balloon.) [to Ai]

In this example, the deictic center is the speaker, Naomi. Aku in soso aku 'to move, away from deictic center' indicates movement of the actor, i.e. Aimalala, away from the speaker.

Example (2) again shows the use of a particle to specify literal movement, an action involving a change in location. The syntactic unit is a canonical transitive verb plus a particle.[2]

(2) IAKOPO (2;7) VI-1(1)-050: Iakopo is eating some dried peas brought to him by the researcher (Mareta). Iakopo's mother, Āpolo (Ā), is teasing him, saying that he got the peas from a girl named Ruta.

I: eka mai [='aumai] o [=i 'ō]*/ [*where Mareta lives]
Mareta bring over there
(Mareta brought [them][from]over there.) [to Ā]

kau [=fa'atau] mai pi a'u/
barter toward peas my
(Bought my peas [for me].) [to Ā]

Example (3) shows the use of a particle to indicate figurative movement, specifically in referring to acts of communication. Acts of communication are distinguished from the actions illustrated in (1) and (2) in that no change in location is involved in the activity. Utterances of this type do make reference to a source, a goal and the path between them. However, in these cases, no entity is moving along the path from source to goal. The relevant syntactic unit is a verb of communication plus particle.

(3) MATU'U (2;1) I-1(2)-389: Matu'u is inside the house sitting next to the researcher (Mareta). Matu'u's older brother, Gaiga (G), is somewhere outside the house.

MATU'U	OTHERS
	G: ((distant))
	reta [=Mareta] Mareta
	Mareta Mareta
	(Mareta, Mareta.)
la'u [=vala'au] mai/	
call toward	
([Gaiga] is calling [you].)	
peta [=Mareta] la'u mai (2X)/	
Mareta call toward	
(Mareta, [Gaiga] is calling [you].)	

Example (4) shows the use of a deictic particle to specify figurative movement in referring to a perceptual state. Reference is made to the semantic relationship between perceiver and perceived object. The syntactic unit is a verb of perception plus particle. As in (3), no change in location is involved here.

(4) NIULALA (3;8) VIII-1(2)-046: Niulala's mother, Akenese (Ak), is teasing him about being afraid of a pig that is approaching the house. Niulala denies it.

N: LEAI/
no
(NO.)

N: ga 'e'ē mai i le/
tns squeal toward there
([It]* squealed toward [me] [from] there.) [*the pig]

ae sau gofogofo i le/
but come sit there
(But it came and sat there.)

( ) o o o va'ai aku loa lalo/ [to Ak]
look at away from now down
(Look at [it] now down there.)

(The construction 'e'ē mai 'squeal, toward deictic center' in this example is another instance of a verb of communication plus particle.)

Examples (5) and (6) show the use of -mai and -atu to indicate figurative movement in referring to attributes. In (5), the particle -mai is used as an evidential. Evidentials are grammatical elements that indicate the perceptual source of the information contained in a speaker's utterance. In Samoan, when -mai is used as an evidential, it typically refers to an object or event that the speaker can see at the time of the utterance.

(5) MATU'U (2;4) III-3(1)-053 (video): Matu'u is lying on a mat near the researcher and watching the videotape recorder.

→ tape spinning inside VTR

M: uia la a lea/
oh! ? emph this
(Oh! Look at this!)

lea/
this
(This.)

ola mai/
alive toward
([I see it] spinning.)

Example (6) shows the use of -atu in a comparative to indicate that one object possesses some attribute to a greater extent than some other object. In this example, one object is specified as being better than other objects.

(6) NIULALA (3;8) VIII-1(2)-014: Niulala is talking about a pig that is approaching the house. He compares this pig with other pigs owned by his family.

N: se'i mai [='aumai] pua'a ( ) pua'a pua'a lelei aku/
let me bring pig pig pig good away from
(Let me bring [that] pig [that is] better than [the others].)

( ) pua'a lelei aku/
pig good away from
(( ) pig better than [the others].)

These syntactic and semantic properties of -mai and -atu are summarized in Table 1.

An analysis of spontaneous child utterances with -mai and -atu revealed two major developmental patterns. First, -mai was used

TABLE 1: Syntactic and Semantic Properties of -mai and -atu

	Syntactic Unit	Semantic Function	
Action Relations	*intransitive verb + particle soso'to move' + mai'toward' soso'to move' + atu'away from'	action involving change in location	Literal Movement
	*canonical transitive verb + particle fa'atau'to barter' + mai'toward' ['to buy'] fa'atau'to barter' + atu'away from' ['to sell']	action involving change in location	
	*verb of communication + particle vala'au'to call' + mai'toward' vala'au'to call' + atu'away from'	act of communication	Figurative Movement
State Relations	*verb of perception (cognition/emotion/desire) + particle va'ai'to look at/see' + mai'toward' va'ai'to look at/see' + atu'away from'	perceptual (cognitive/emotional) state	
	*attribute + particle ola'alive' + mai'toward' lelei'good' + atu'away from'	attribute evidential comparative	

earlier and more productively than -atu. (Iakopo, one of the two youngest children, had no spontaneous instances of -atu in his speech corpus. The first instances of his use of -mai appeared in the fourth recording session. The following percentages show the proportion of spontaneous utterances with -mai versus those with -atu in the speech corpus of each of the other three children. MATU'U: -mai 79%(55), -atu 21%(15); NAOMI: -mai 78%(71), -atu 22%(20); NIULALA -mai 67%(53), -atu 33%(26).) Furthermore, -mai was used with a wider range of co-occurrence categories and with a wider range of lexical items within categories. For example, Matu'u used -mai in conjunction with intransitive verbs, canonical transitive verbs, verbs of communication, verbs of perception and attributes. On the other hand, she used -atu in conjunction with only intransitive verbs, canonical transitive verbs and verbs of communication. Naomi used -mai with 31 different canonical transitive verbs compared to 10 different canonical transitive verbs with -atu.

Given that -mai and -atu are formally identical lexical units and occur in the same syntactic contexts, the explanation for this developmental pattern seems to be a semantic one. Data from a variety

of languages suggest that movement of one object toward another is one of the earliest spatial relationships young children talk about (Clark and Clark 1977). Young children's early preference for interpreting spatial relations in favor of movement toward nas been demonstrated in several studies where instructions to move one object toward another object were correctly acted out, while instructions to move one object away from another object were not (e.g. Garman, Griffiths and Wales 1970, Clark and Garnica 1974, Macrae 1976a). Consistent with these findings, the Samoan children in the present study seem not only to be expressing movement toward, with the particle -mai, earlier and more productively than movement away from, but they are also expressing movement toward in a wider range of semantic contexts.

The second major developmental pattern is that 89% (221 out of 248) of all spontaneous child utterances with -mai and -atu specified actions involving a change in location or acts of communication. These are the two semantic functions grouped under action relations in Table 1. Examples (1), (2) and (3) above show the children's use of deictic particles to refer to action relations.

This developmental trend in the use of -mai and -atu supports studies of English-speaking children that document the predominance of action based semantic categories in young children's speech (e.g. Nelson 1973, Bloom, Lightbown and Hood 1975). These studies demonstrate that children's early use of language centers around semantic relations involving actual or potential movement. Among children's earliest vocabulary items are words for movers, e.g. people and animals, and moveables, e.g. toys and food (Nelson 1973, Greenfield and Smith 1976). Children's early use of language primarily involves the encoding of their own and other's actions which may or may not involve a second object, i.e. intransitive and transitive actions. Only after children are productively encoding semantic relations having to do with action, do they begin to encode states of being of objects (e.g. attributes, emotions, perceptual and cognitive states).

The information in Table 2 shows that this developmental progression characterizes the use of -mai and -atu by the four children in this study. Iakopo used -mai to refer to an action involving a change in location and to acts of communication. (He had no instances of -atu in his speech corpus.) Matu'u used both -mai and -atu to refer to actions involving a change in location and to acts of communication. There was one instance when she used -mai with reference to a perceptual state and three cases where she used -mai as an evidential to refer to an attribute. The two older children, Naomi and Niulala, used -mai more productively to refer to state relations (i.e. perceptual states and attributes). Furthermore, unlike the younger children (Iakopo and Matu'u), Naomi and Niulala were beginning to use -atu to refer to state relations as well. Naomi used -atu to refer to perceptual states but not to refer to attributes. Niulala, the oldest child, used -atu to refer to perceptual states and, during the last recording session, used this particle in comparatives to refer to attributes. Thus, the children first use -mai and -atu in encoding action relations. When they begin to use a particle in

encoding state relations, they do so first with -mai.

TABLE 2: Semantic Functions of -mai and -atu in Each Child's Speech Corpus

	Iakopo(2;1)	Matu'u(2;1)	Naomi(2;10)	Niulala(2;11)
Action Relations	-mai:	-mai & -atu:	-mai & -atu:	-mai & -atu:
	action with change in location	action with change in location	action with change in location	action with change in location
	act of communication	act of communication	act of communication	act of communication
State Relations		-mai:	-mai:	-mai:
		perceptual state	perceptual state	perceptual state
		attribute	attribute	attribute
			-atu:	-atu:
			perceptual state	perceptual state
				attribute

The semantic functions the children most often expressed with -mai and -atu are those most closely tied to the sensorimotor plane. That is, -mai and -atu are used to indicate actual change in location of animate and inanimate objects and to indicate acts of communication. When the use of the particles is extended to refer to a more abstract or metaphorical instance of movement, e.g. perceptual states or attributes, this first occurs in specifying movement toward.

The data presented here show how deictic particles in Samoan are used to refer to a variety of semantic relations that may or may not involve a metaphorical extension of the notions MOVEMENT TOWARD and MOVEMENT AWAY FROM. These semantic relations seem to be more explicitly grammaticized in Samoan than they may be in other languages. The analysis presented here shows how children's reference to these semantic relations, using -mai and -atu, is constrained by their preference for expressing movement toward together with their preference for encoding action relations rather than state relations. Looking at Samoan allows us to view the effect of these two cognitive preferences on early language use within the context of a single syntactic unit.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE ENGLISH GLOSSES

art=article, conj=conjunction, emph=emphatic particle, tns=tense

NOTES

1. Each example is labeled with the following information: NAME OF CHILD (age at recording time (years;months)) recording session # - tape # - (side #) - tape counter #.
2. Canonical transitive verbs in Samoan are distinguished from intransitive verbs and what have been called 'middle verbs' (Chung 1978). (Middle verbs are typically verbs of perception, cognition, emotion or desire, e.g. 'to love'.) Subjects of canonical transitive verbs take the ergative case marker, while subjects of intransitive and middle verbs do not.

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